

Narratives of the Fall: Structure and Meaning in the Genesis Frieze at Hagia Sophia, Trebizond

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The church of Hagia Sophia stands 2 km to the west of the walled citadel of Trebizond on an outcrop overlooking the Black Sea (Fig. 1).¹ It is the most impressive surviving monument of the Grand Komnenoi emperors of Trebizond, and is dated by a donor portrait, now lost, to the reign of Manuel I Grand Komnenos (1238–63).² The church contains the finest Byzantine wall paintings of the thirteenth century, but it also has many peculiarities that have never been fully explained, such as the unusual plinth on which the church stands, the three porches that precede all the entrances to the church, its architectural layout, its sculptural decoration, and many aspects of the wall-painting program. This article examines one of the peculiarities—the sculptural frieze of scenes from Genesis that runs across the south porch of the church.

The Genesis frieze, which appears in a series of carved blocks on the south porch of the church, is one of the more unusual artistic products of the Byzantine world (Fig. 2). Despite this, it has received relatively little attention from scholars. It was first published in an engraving by Charles Texier in 1864 as part of his general description of the church. He was relying on his memories of visiting Trebizond some thirty years earlier, and the image is correspondingly vague. His representation includes many errors, and he entirely misreads the inscriptions.³ When George Finlay, the traveler and early historian of the empire, visited the church in 1850, he noted in his journal only that “there is a very strange frieze with figures in high relief on the southern wall and an inscription.”⁴

¹The principal publication of the church is that produced after its restoration by the Russell Trust in 1957–64: D. Talbot Rice, ed., *The Church of Hagia Sophia at Trebizond* (Edinburgh, 1968).

²The portrait was described by G. Finlay (ed. J. M. Hussey, *The Journals and Letters of George Finlay*, vol. 1, *The Journals* [Camberley, Surrey, 1995], 301); and a copy of it was made by G. Gagarine (see *Sobranie vizantij-skikh, gruzinskikh i drevnerusskikh ornamentov i pamjatnikov arkhitektury* [Recueil d'ornements et d'architecture byzantines, géorgiens et russes] [St. Petersburg, 1897], pl. 25). The image was missing by 1866.

³C. Texier and R. Pullan, *Byzantine Architecture Illustrated by a Series of the Earliest Christian Edifices in the East* (London, 1864), 199–201 and pl. LXa–LXv. G. Millet, “Les monastères et les églises de Trébizonde,” *BCH* 19 (1895): 419, notes the inadequacies and inaccuracies of Texier's drawings.

⁴Ed. Hussey, *Journals of George Finlay*, 300.

The first (and only) detailed account of the frieze was produced by Mikhail Alpatov in 1927, and this was very heavily relied on by David Talbot Rice in his 1968 description.⁵

This article reexamines every aspect of the frieze, including its composition, liturgical importance, and function within the church, and makes use of the accompanying inscriptions, which were generally ignored by previous writers. No complete photographic record of the frieze has ever been published, and I am very grateful to David Winfield for permission to publish the photographs taken by him from scaffolding during the Russell Trust restoration of the church.

I. DESCRIPTION

The Genesis frieze is approximately 8 m long and 75 cm high (Figs. 3–6). The scenes are carved on twenty blocks of differing sizes, and above them run two inscriptions incised on thirteen blocks of stone that interlink with those below. The inscriptions and the frieze are divided in two by the architecture of the porch—the pointed center arch, which rises above the bottom line of the frieze, and a small quatrefoil window, which cuts into it from above. Between these there is a small carved shell conch, displayed pointing upward. Around the frieze are a series of other carved figures and inlaid designs that are not linked directly to the frieze and are not discussed here.

The frieze runs from right to left across the porch and contains seven scenes. Many of the details of all the figures are now badly weathered, but enough remains to reconstruct the sequence with some certainty:

1. The first scene (Figs. 4, 6), at the right end, shows the creation of Eve. The hand of God appears from an aureole in the top right corner of the main block and conjures Eve with a gesture of blessing from the body of Adam, who is shown reclining on his left elbow amongst the trees and plants of Paradise. The figure of Eve has now almost completely disappeared, but her approximate outline can be made out rising from the ribs of Adam. This scene is the only one to have been carved on a horizontal block; it has been enlarged by the addition of four small blocks that extend the foliage background to fill gaps above and to the right of the main stone.

2. The next scene shows the temptation of Eve. Eve, facing to the right, reaches up with her left hand to pick the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge. The serpent has entwined itself around the tree, and looks closely into the eyes of Eve. Eve has long hair and wears a robe that descends to her feet in a series of sketchily delineated folds.

3. The third scene, now in very bad condition, is carved over two blocks and shows Adam and Eve facing each other as Eve hands over the fruit for Adam to eat. Again the two figures are shown in long robes, but all the details of Eve are now lost. In the background of all the scenes on the right half of the porch, the trees of Paradise burst forth with luxuriant foliage; these trees continue alone across the center of the porch's arch. The base line of the trees on these blocks rises successively toward the center of the arch, showing that there was not enough room for full figures in this section.

⁵M. Alpatov, "Les reliefs de la Sainte-Sophie de Trébizonde," *Byzantion* 4 (1927–28): 407–18; Talbot Rice, *Hagia Sophia*, 47–49. More recently, L. Safran, "The Genesis Frieze at Hagia Sophia at Trebizond," *BSCAbstr* 20 (1994): 29, has examined the liturgical nature of the frieze, noting many of the same points that I do here. Unfortunately, Safran has only published her work as a brief abstract; I have not had access to her whole paper.



1 Hagia Sophia, Trebizond, general view from the southwest, 1238–63 (© Judith Herrin, Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London)



2 Hagia Sophia, Trebizond, south porch (© John Stewart Taylor, Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London)



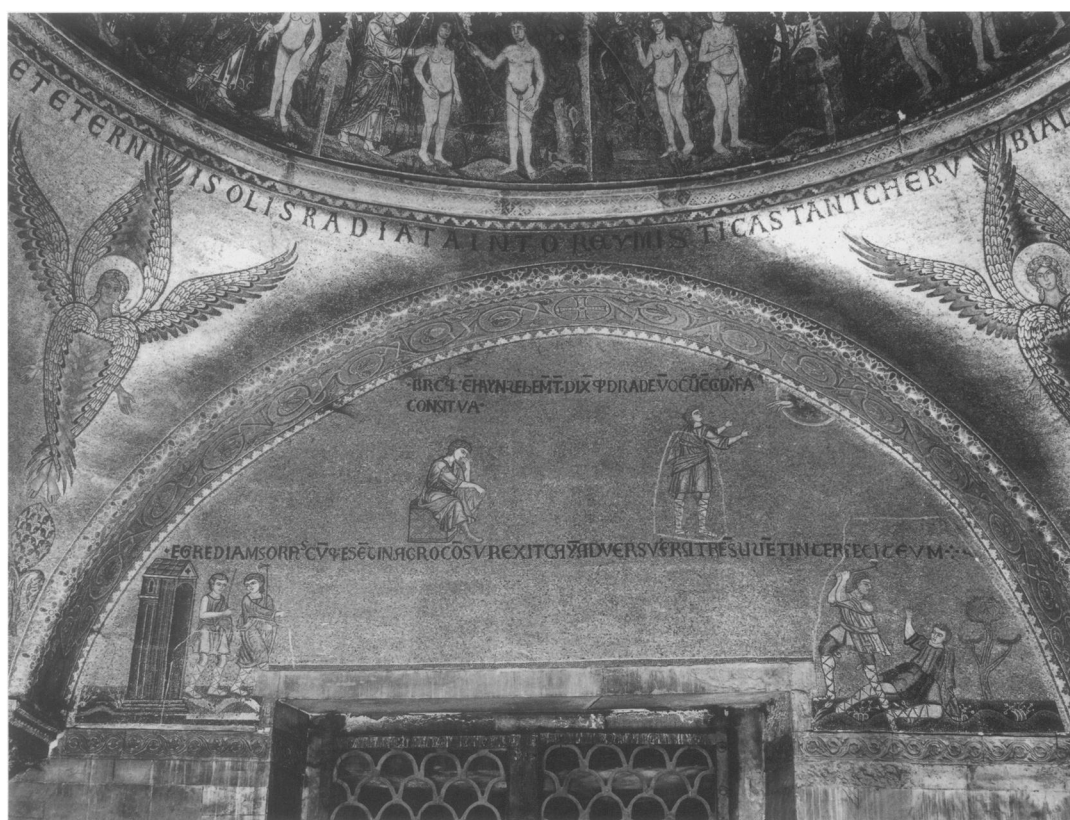
3 Hagia Sophia, Trebizond, south porch showing the left section of the Genesis frieze (photo: courtesy of David Winfield and the Russell Trust)



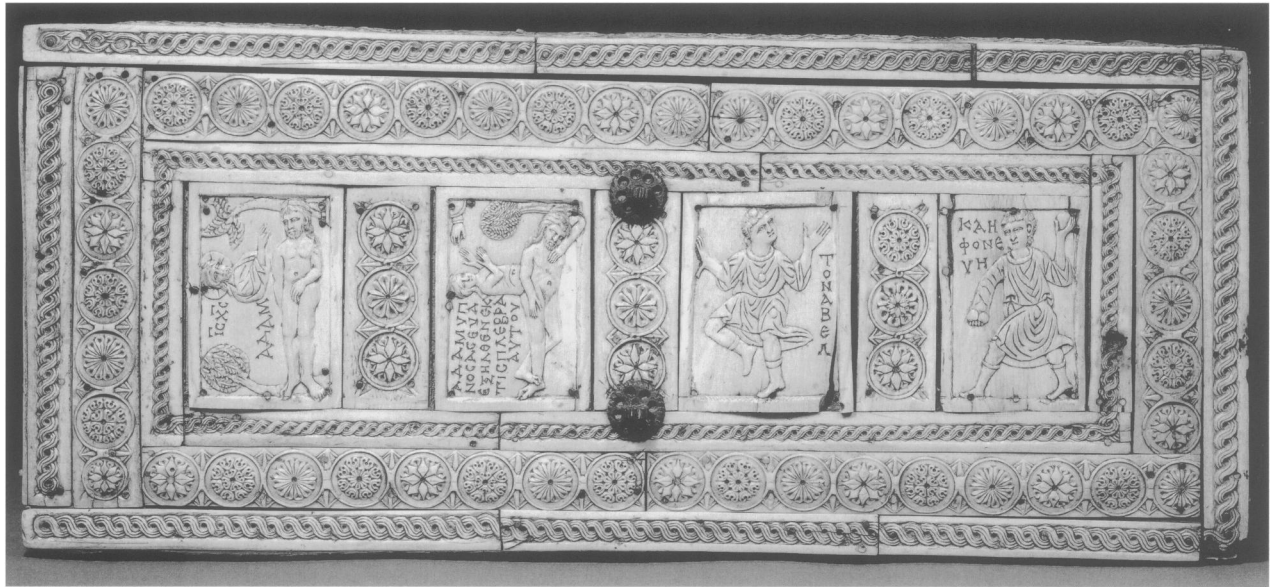
5 Hagia Sophia, Trebizond, south porch, schema of the left section of the Genesis frieze



7 San Marco, Venice, atrium showing Genesis mosaics from the conception of Cain to the brothers' sacrifices to God (photo: Osvaldo Böhm)



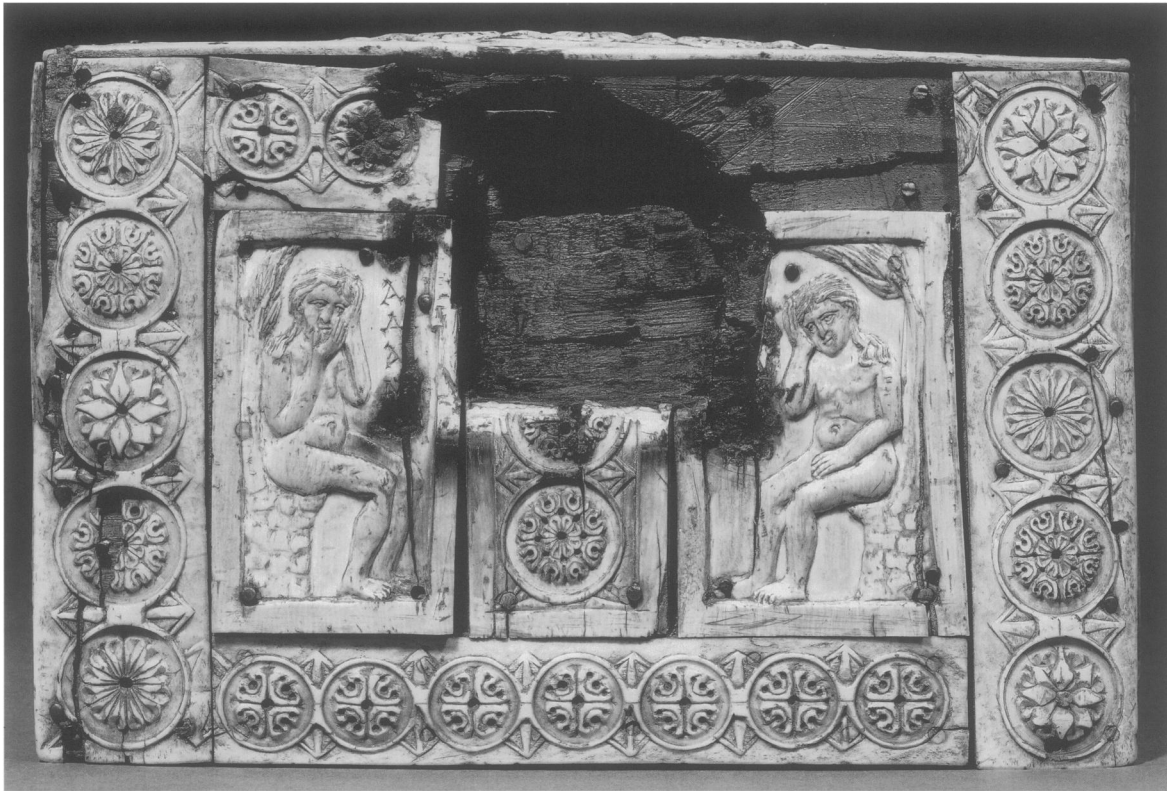
8 San Marco, Venice, atrium showing Cain's murder of Abel (photo: Osvaldo Böhm)



9 Casket with Adam and Eve, lid. Byzantium, 11th–12th century, ivory over wood core, length 46.7 cm (© The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1997, gift of J. H. Wade, John L. Severance, W. G. Mather, and F. F. Prentiss, 1924.747)



10 Casket with Adam and Eve, front (© The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1997, gift of J. H. Wade, John L. Severance, W. G. Mather, and F. F. Prentiss, 1924.747)



11 Casket with Adam and Eve, end (© The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1997, gift of J. H. Wade, John L. Severance, W. G. Mather, and F. F. Prentiss, 1924.747)



12 Ivory plaque with Adam and Eve, scene with Cain and Abel. Byzantium or Italy, 11th century. Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, D 312 (photo: Studio Basset, 69300 Caluire)



13 John Klimakos, *Heavenly Ladder*, temptation and expulsion (Vat. gr. 394, fol. 77r). Byzantium, 11th century (photo: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana)



14 Homilies of James of Kokkinobaphos, Adam and Eve outside Paradise, Cain and Abel (Vat. gr. 1162, fol. 35v). Byzantium, 12th century (photo: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana)



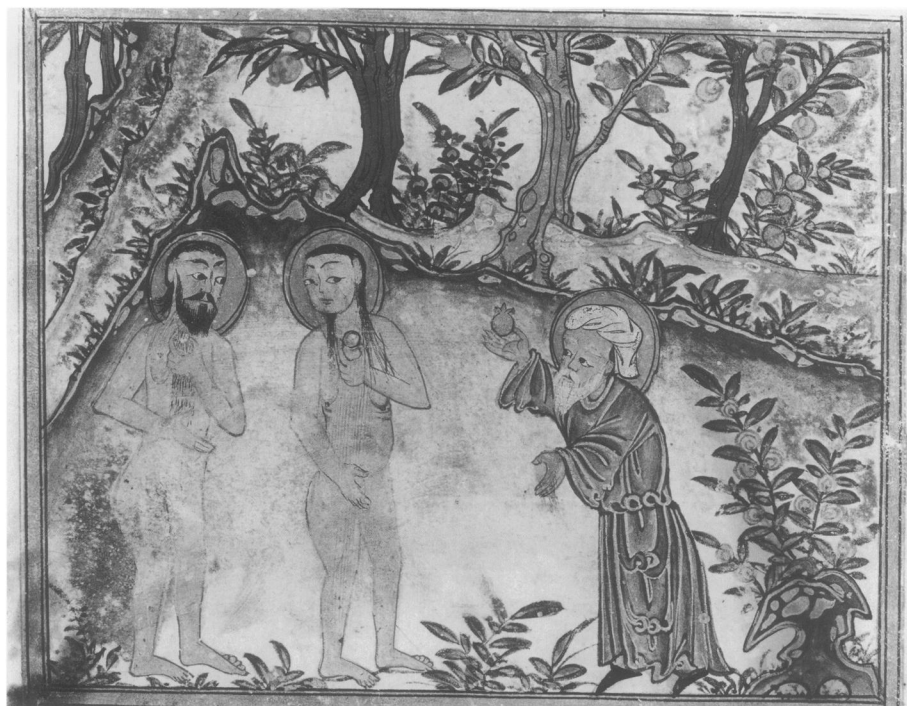
15 Homilies of James of Kokkinobaphos, Paradise (Vat. gr. 1162, fol. 37r). Byzantium, 12th century (photo: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana)



16 Octateuch, naming of the animals, creation of Eve (Istanbul, Topkapı gr. 8, fol. 42v). Byzantium, 11th century (photo: courtesy of John Lowden)



17 Ibn Bakhtishu, *Manafi-i hayavan*, man and woman (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M500, fol. 4v). Maragha, Iran, 1297 or 1299 (photo: David A. Loggie)



18 Al-Biruni, *al-Athar al-baqiya*, Misha and Mishyana tempted by Ahriman (Edinburgh, University Library, Or. Ms. 161, fol. 48v). Iran, 1307-8 (photo: courtesy of the library)



20 Tokalı Kilise, Old Church, Cappadocia, scene of the Annunciation, 10th century (photo: A. Wharton)



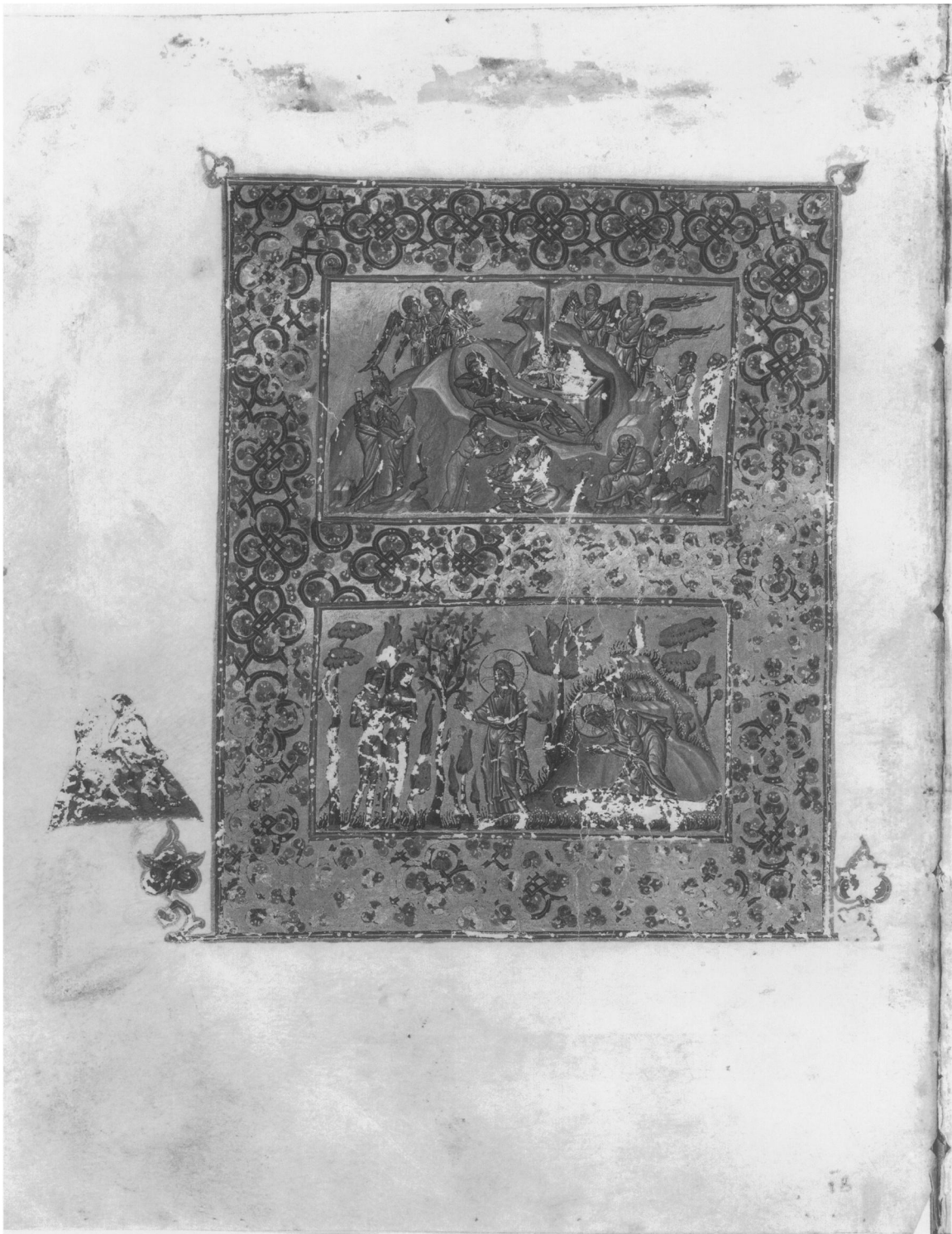
21 Haḫbat Gospels, entry to Jerusalem (Erevan, Matenadaran, 6288, fol. 16v). Northern Armenia, 1211 (after E. Korkhmazian, I. Drampian, and G. Hakopian, *Armenian Miniatures of the 13th and 14th Centuries from the Matenadaran Collection, Yerevan* [Leningrad, 1984], pl. 13)



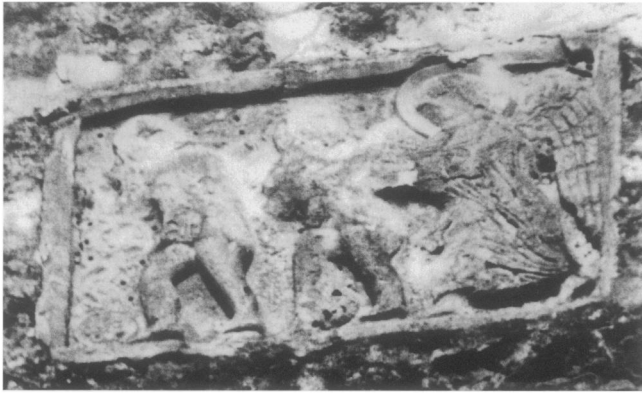
22 Gospel Lectionary, Annunciation (London, British Library, Add. 7170, fol. 15r). Northern Mesopotamia, 1216–20 (photo: courtesy of the library)



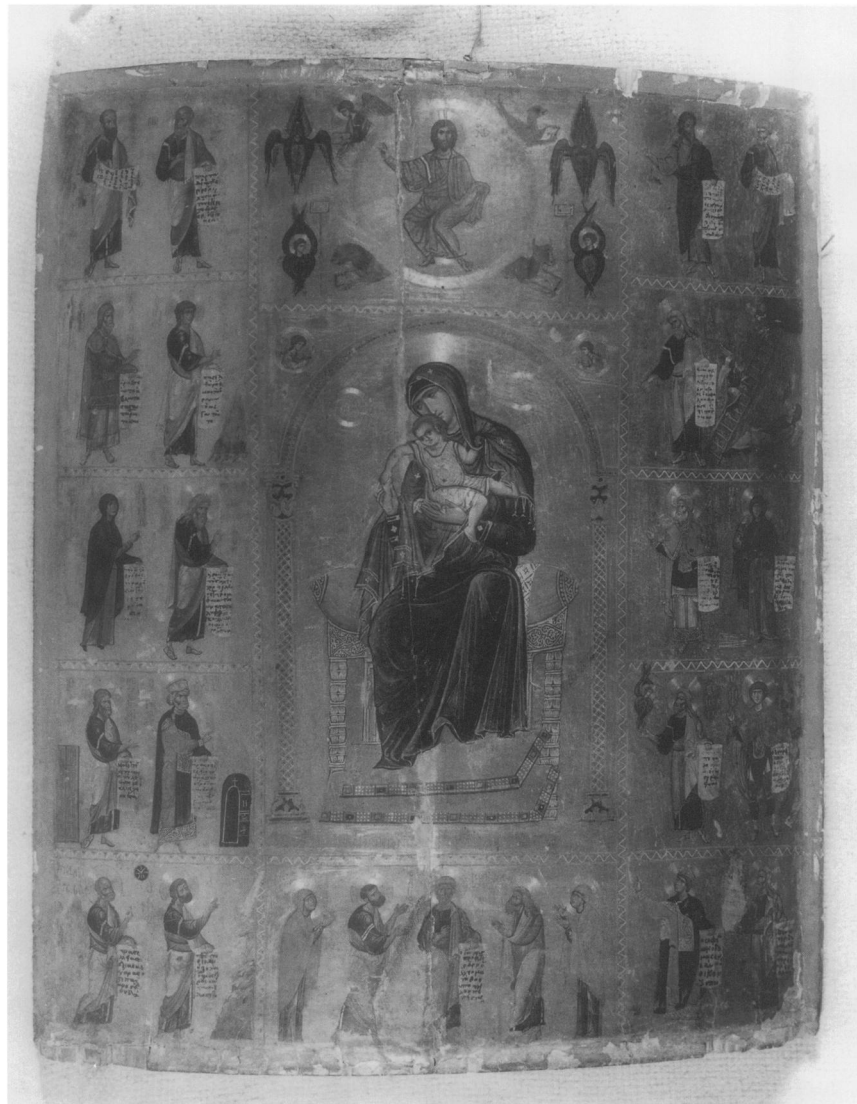
23 Homilies of Gregory Nazianzos, martyrdom of the Maccabees (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cod. gr. 543, fol. 74v). Byzantium, 14th century (photo: courtesy of the library)



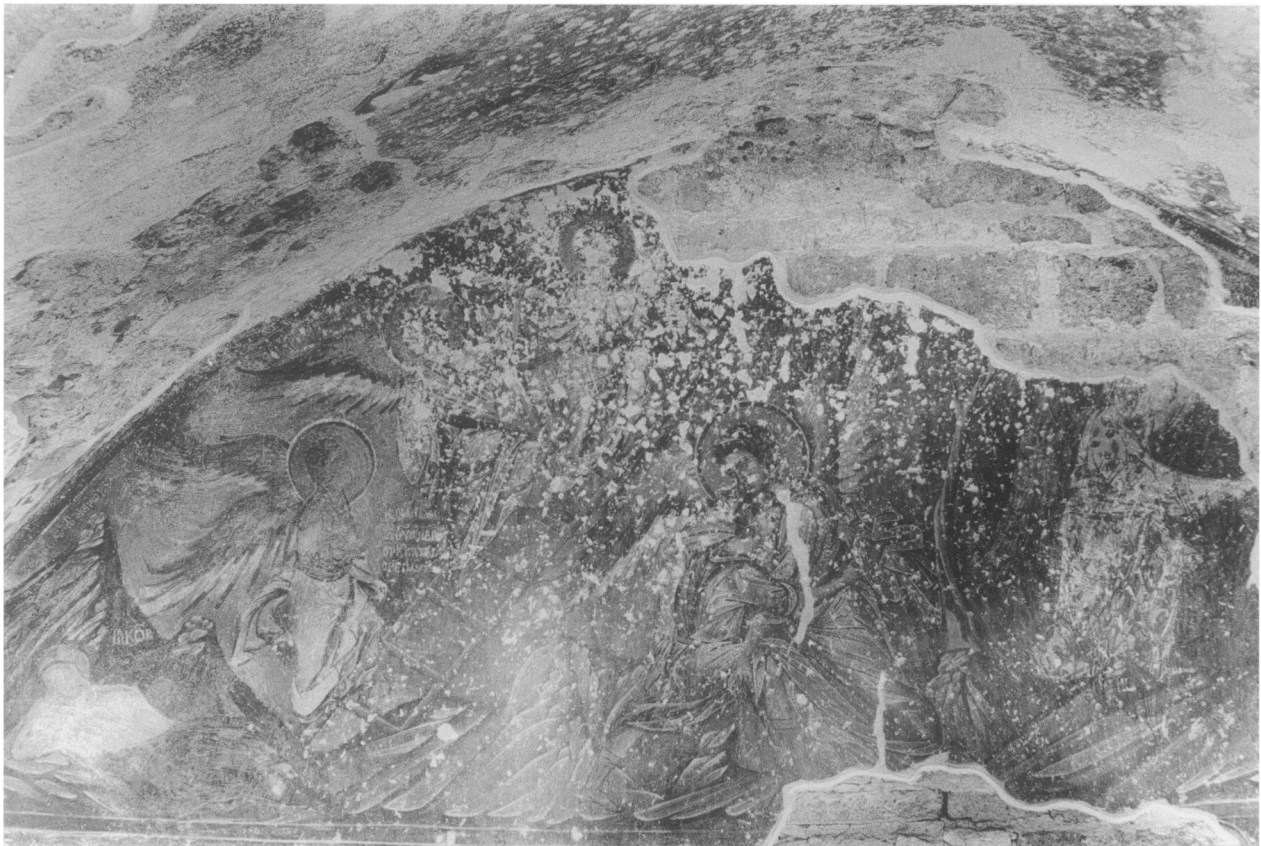
24 Homilies of Gregory Nazianzos, nativity and expulsion (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cod. gr. 543, fol. 116v).
Byzantium, 14th century (photo: courtesy of the library)



25 Citadel, Trebizond, east wall showing the expulsion, 13th century (after A. A. M. Bryer and D. Winfield, *The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos*, DOS 20 [Washington, D.C., 1985], pl. 130a)



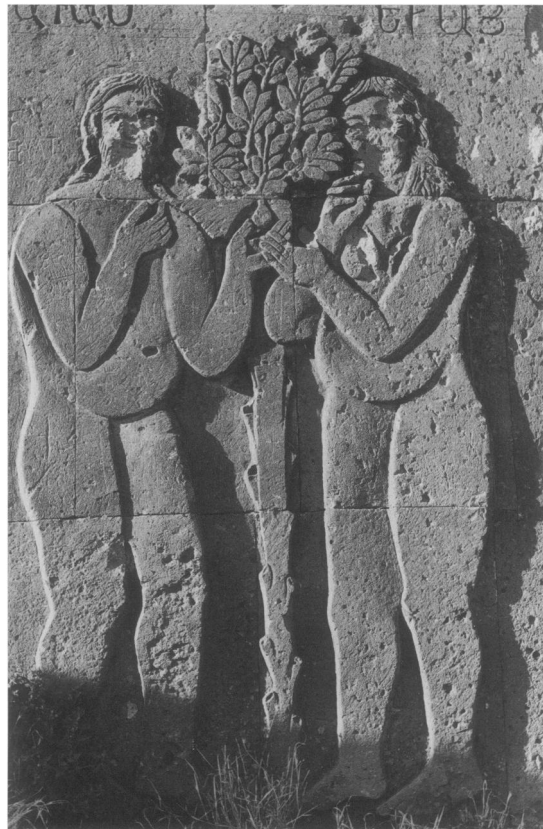
26 Icon of the Mother of God of Kykkos with prophets, monastery of St. Catherine, Mt. Sinai. Byzantium, 11th century (photo: courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai)



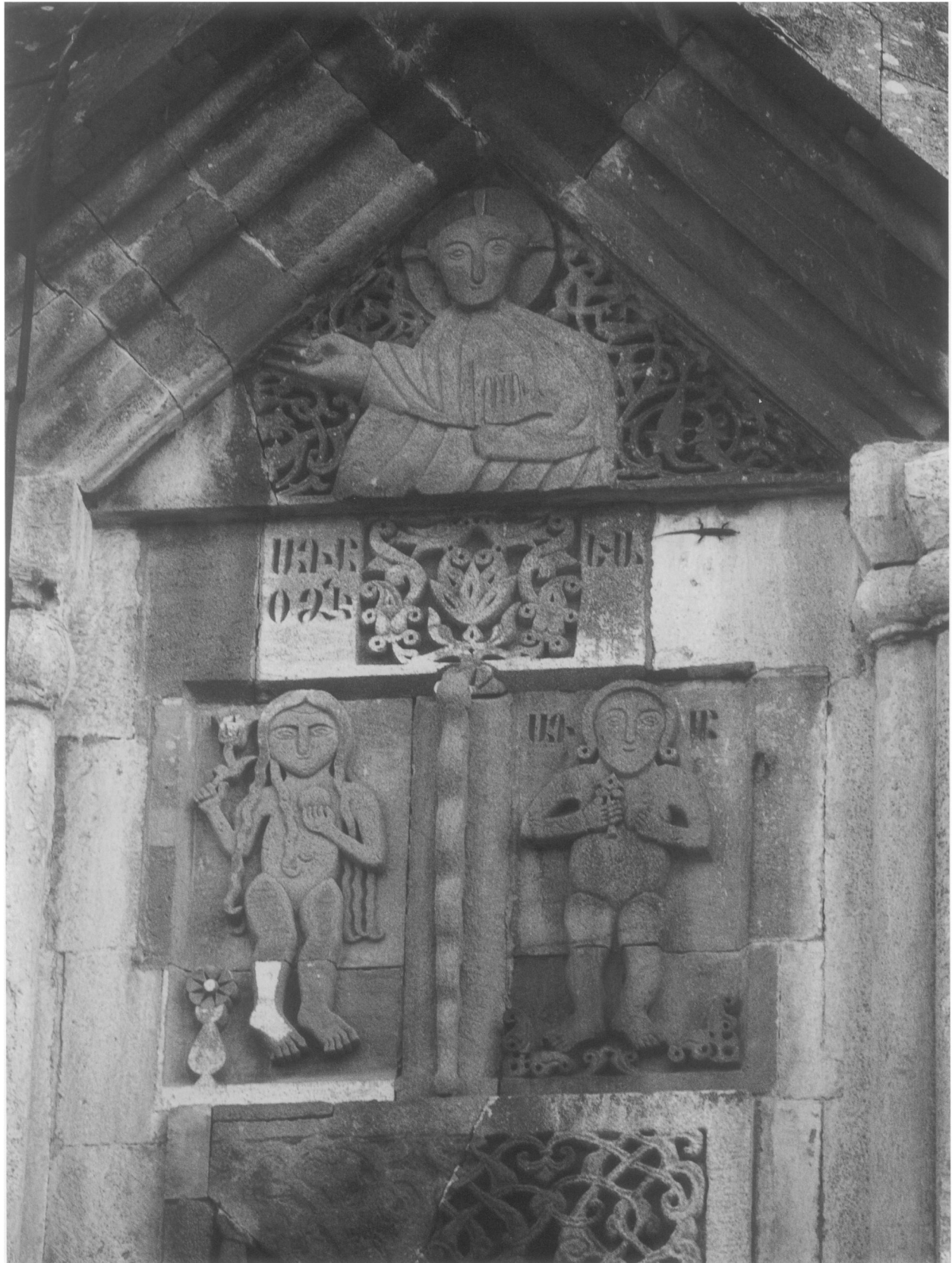
27 Hagia Sophia, Trebizond, north wall of the north porch showing Jacob's ladder, Jacob's struggle with an angel, and Moses and the burning bush (photo: courtesy of David Winfield and the Russell Trust)



28 Church of the Holy Cross, Alt'amar, Lake Van, north facade showing the temptation of Eve, 915–921 (© John Stewart Taylor, Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London)



29 Church of the Holy Cross, Alt'amar, Lake Van, north facade showing Eve offering the forbidden fruit to Adam, 915–921 (© John Stewart Taylor, Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London)



30 Ganjasar, west face of the dome showing Adam and Eve, ca. 1230 (photo: Adriano Alpago-Novello; © Oemme Edizioni)



31 "Georgian church," Ani, general view of the interior of the north wall, before 1218 (photo: courtesy of the Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London)



32 "Georgian church," Ani, scene of the Annunciation (photo: courtesy of the Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London)



33 "Georgian church," Ani, scene of the Visitation (photo: courtesy of the Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London)

4. The frieze starts again on the left side of the arch with the closed gate of Eden (Figs. 3, 5). The door is depicted as a splendid architectural device with an elaborately carved frame surmounted by a magnificent shell-headed niche. Within it, an angel with extended wings and a spear in each outstretched hand blocks and guards the entrance. The size of the door decoration is such that the angel is half the size of all the other figures in the frieze.

5. Following this, and carved on three blocks, is the expulsion from Eden. An angel is shown driving the errant humans from Paradise. The angel leans forward on his right foot, with his left heel raised and his right hand out toward the humans. He is the most dynamic figure in the frieze, but this sense of movement, designed to emphasize the act of expulsion, is undermined by the very static poses of the two humans. Adam and Eve face each other and thus negate further any consistent sense of narrative direction. They are now shown naked; they stand opposite each other with their heads bowed and their hands raised to their faces in gestures of horror and despair at what they have done. Eve's body is curiously twisted, with her right leg in front of her left (perhaps in a display of modesty or shame) whereas Adam stands in a more straightforward pose. The angel's left wing is cut off by the right edge of the block, producing an awkward link with the scene to the right, which again suggests that the overall visual coherence of the frieze was not carefully established in advance.

6. The sixth scene shows Adam and Eve lamenting again. Now the pair sit facing each other on two low mounds, but otherwise their poses are much the same as in the previous scene, with their hands raised to their faces and their heads bowed lower.

7. The final scene, which has been constructed much more carefully in order to fit into the side of the porch's arch, is again badly eroded, and is the hardest to identify. In 1895, Gabriel Millet proposed that it showed the birth of Cain,⁶ but in 1927 Alpatov suggested that it showed Cain's murder of Abel,⁷ and the latter identification has now been generally accepted. One figure can be seen lying on the ground facing right, cut off from the knees down by the edge of the arch. His right hand is raised to his face, and his left is draped across his chest. He wears a long robe with a hem running horizontally along his body. Looming over him is a second figure in whose outstretched hands there appears to be a shadow of a rock or boulder. This scene, then, shows the moment of the killing. The instrument of the murder is not mentioned in Genesis, but most of the early commentators concluded that Cain had used either a rock or a staff.⁸

The frieze, when examined as a single composition, is uneven and inconsistent, even messy. It appears to be divided into a series of paired tableaux; and it seems that each block has been carved separately, with little consideration of the appearance of those around it. The figures vary in size considerably both between scenes and within them, especially in the scene of the expulsion from Eden. The depth of carving appears to vary considerably as well, although this is harder to determine now, given the erosion that the frieze has suffered: the nude figures on the left-hand side look to be in higher relief and

⁶ Millet, "Les monastères et les églises de Trébizonde," 457.

⁷ Alpatov, "Les reliefs de la Sainte-Sophie," 412.

⁸ V. Aptowitzer, *Kain und Abel in der Agada, den Apokryphen, der hellenistischen, christlichen und muhammedanischen Literatur* (Vienna-Leipzig, 1922), 44.

more rounded than the clothed figures on the right. There is no consistent sense of movement across the frieze. Only one figure, the angel of the expulsion scene, is shown in a dynamic pose; the rest are in static postures. However, the depiction of dress is fairly consistent across the frieze, with all robes carved in a single plane, with many shallow, incised lines to indicate folds. Gestures are also repeated with little variation. But, other than these relatively minor points, there seems to have been little attempt at creating a unified whole.

Each half of the frieze, nonetheless, is clearly themed and has some internal cohesion. On the right-hand side, the glory and richness of life before the Fall are indicated by the clothed figures of Adam and Eve and by the luxuriant foliage that fills every inch of the background to the center of the arch and beyond to the gate of Paradise. On the left-hand side, the aridity and pain of life outside Eden manifest themselves in the nudity of the figures, the barrenness of the setting—there is no foliage here—and the oft-repeated gesture of lamentation, that of the hand raised to the face.⁹ A few surviving fragments of paint were noticed on the frieze by its modern restorers, although none is visible from the ground.¹⁰ This suggests that the frieze was originally painted, which would have made the visual opposition between Eden and the exile much starker.

The themes of each half of the frieze are emphasized by the two inscriptions, each incised above the carving in a clear line of capitals (majuscule) with few abbreviations or ligatures. The inscription on the left, which would be read first, comes from the Lenten Triodion, specifically the service of vespers on the eve of the Sunday before Lent (the Sunday of Forgiveness): † Ἐκ[άθισ]ε[ν] Ἀδ[άμ] ἀπέ[ναντι τοῦ Παρ]α[δεί]σου καὶ τὴν ἰδίαν γύμνωσιν θρην[ῶ]ν ὠδύρετο (“Adam sat before Paradise and, lamenting his nakedness, he wept”).¹¹ That on the right comes from Genesis 2.8: † Ἐφύτευσεν ὁ θε[ὸς] Παράδεισον ἐν Ἐδέμ κ[α]τ[ὰ] ἀνατολὰς καὶ ἔθετ[ο] ἐκεῖ τὸν ἄνθ[ρωπο]ν ὃν ἔπλασε (“And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed”). Each can be associated with the section of the frieze below it.

The order of construction of the frieze is difficult to establish. The irregular size of the blocks and the fragmentary nature of the narrative suggest that they were carved before being installed on the south porch.¹² However, some scenes were clearly carefully designed for their future positions: the composition of the murder of Abel, for instance, was certainly designed to match its location against the frame of the arch; and the bases of the trees of Paradise in the central portion were also angled to accommodate the rising

⁹On this gesture, see H. Maguire, “The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art,” *DOP* 31 (1977): 123–74, esp. 132–51.

¹⁰I am very grateful to David Winfield for bringing this to my attention. Supporting evidence can be found in the polychrome appearance of other elements of the south porch, such as the inlaid panel with a star and crescent motif to the right of the central quatrefoil. Polychrome sculpture is known elsewhere in the Byzantine and eastern Christian world; see, for example, A. Grabar, *Sculptures byzantines de Constantinople*, vol. 1, *IVe-Xe siècle* (Paris, 1963), esp. 100–122. For a recent but controversial view on Byzantine polychromy, see C. Connor, *The Color of Ivory: Polychromy on Byzantine Ivories* (Princeton, N.J., 1998).

¹¹*Triodion* (Rome, 1879), 100; trans. Mother Mary and K. Ware, *The Lenten Triodion* (London, 1978), 169. My reading of the inscriptions is taken from their recording by Millet, “Les monastères et les églises de Trébizonde,” 457 n. 2. Millet gives his reference only as *Triodion*, 58a, without ever quoting an edition; and this has been repeated by all subsequent writers.

¹²This order of construction was proposed by Talbot Rice, *Hagia Sophia*, 47.

base line of the frieze at this point. On the other hand, four blocks were needed to enlarge and change the shape of the creation of Eve scene in order to make it fit its irregular location by adding more background foliage, which indicates that this end of the frieze had not been predetermined. It suggests that the frieze was set in place from left to right, with the additional blocks added to the creation scene to fill up the few final gaps. If this is correct and the order of installation was thus opposite to that of the narrative, it shows that the content and limits of the narrative had been determined before the frieze was carved. The inscriptions were certainly carved after the frieze was installed. The carver took into account the narrowing of the inscription blocks above the angel of the expulsion scene in the left half, and reduced the height of the attendant inscription as a result. The right-hand inscription is carved on blocks of consistent width, and all the letters are consequently taller.

II. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

As all commentators have noted, there are a number of oddities about the frieze, such as its right-to-left narrative movement; the decision to show the protoplasts clothed before the Fall and naked afterward; the unusually prominent use of sculpture for a Byzantine narrative frieze; and the appearance of a liturgical inscription alongside the Genesis quotation on the facade of the church. Scholars have sought explanations for all these elements, and have generally looked to “Oriental,” mostly Syriac, sources for possible models.¹³ This article aims to reinvestigate all the elements of the frieze, reevaluating these peculiarities. In my opinion, the principal theological meaning of the frieze and the interpretations of many of its elements can be found within the mainstream of Byzantine culture, in particular by reference to the Lenten liturgy. The frieze is not as alien as some commentators have assumed.¹⁴

Nonetheless, I also reexamine the possible eastern models that may have had some influence on the frieze, in order to show that it is possible to find convincing parallels to the frieze in sources closer to the empire of Trebizond, and that these can be tied in with the political position and cultural orientation of the empire in the mid-thirteenth century. In particular, I investigate here Georgian, Armenian, and Islamic sources, which can be shown to have had definite links to the empire, rather than vaguer Syriac models.

Iconography

The most noticeable aspect of the Genesis frieze at Hagia Sophia is the range of the narrative, particularly its unusual choice of scenes at the beginning and the end. The frieze starts with the creation of Eve and ends with the murder of Abel. We are not shown the creation of Adam—which would be the normal start for any account of the Fall—nor do we see the events that led up to Cain’s fratricide, namely, the brothers’ sacrifices to God. The result is a very abbreviated cycle that makes a specific point. If one looks at other Genesis cycles, it is possible to see how carefully selected the Trebizond scenes are.

¹³It should be noted that Alpatov, “Les reliefs de la Sainte-Sophie,” 414, raises Syriac models only as a possible hypothesis, whereas Talbot Rice, *Hagia Sophia*, 49, rephrases this to make the link more concrete.

¹⁴C. Mango, *Byzantine Architecture* (Milan, 1976), 166.

In general, these cycles begin with the creation of Adam, followed by that of Eve, and include the sacrifice of Cain and Abel before the first murder (Figs. 7, 8). Many, of course, start even earlier, with the creation of the cosmos, and include the Fall simply as part of their long narrative cycles that cover large portions (if not all) of the text of Genesis, as in the case of the nave mosaics of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo,¹⁵ the thirteenth-century atrium mosaics in San Marco, Venice,¹⁶ or the comprehensive cycles in Octateuch manuscripts.¹⁷ These cycles clearly have different functions from the more selective Trebizond frieze.

Moreover, the narrative of Trebizond appears unusual even among shorter depictions of the Fall. Those that begin with the creation include that of Adam, and those that show the murder of Abel also show the preceding sacrifice, which explains its cause and significance. The catalogue and analysis by Anna Ürich of the appearance of Cain and Abel in art show that the murder is almost invariably portrayed with this accompaniment.¹⁸ In these symbolic depictions, it becomes a eucharistic parallel in which the nature of the sacrifice is emphasized by the scene of the brothers' offerings to God: the shepherd Abel with his sacrificial sheep is the prototype for Christ.¹⁹ It can be seen that the Cain and Abel image at Trebizond cannot be fitted into either the narrative or the eucharistic scheme, and, combined with the first scene in the frieze, it suggests that one must look to other sources for the frieze's meaning.

The only objects on which a remotely comparable selection of Genesis scenes is shown are a number of Byzantine ivory and bone caskets, variously dated between the tenth and twelfth century.²⁰ The iconography of these varies, but generally includes the creation of Adam and Eve, the temptation, the expulsion, Adam and Eve lamenting outside of Eden, and the murder of Abel. The caskets do not show the image of the brothers' sacrifices. The scenes of the creation and murder generally appear together on their lids, as on the Cleveland casket (Fig. 9), with the other scenes around the sides (Figs. 10, 11). One plaque in the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon (D 312) explicitly links the creation and

¹⁵E. Kitzinger, *I mosaici del periodo normanno in Sicilia*, vol. 2, *La Cappella Palatina di Palermo: I mosaici delle Navate* (Palermo, 1993), 26, figs. 39, 44–46, 49, 50.

¹⁶O. Demus, *The Mosaics of San Marco in Venice* (Chicago-London, 1984), 2:117–18, figs. 134–43. This cycle is, of course, based on the extensive illustrations of the Cotton Genesis (London, British Library, Otho B.VI). The work by P. H. Jolly, *Made in God's Image? Eve and Adam in the Genesis Mosaics at San Marco, Venice* (Berkeley, 1997), is an unsuccessful attempt to interpret the Creation dome at San Marco in terms of 13th-century Venetian ideas.

¹⁷See, for example, F. Ouspensky, *L'Octateuque de la Bibliothèque du Sérail à Constantinople* (Sofia, 1907), pl. ix, figs. 23–27; D. C. Hesseling, *Miniatures de l'Octateuque grec de Smyrne: Manuscrit de l'école évangélique de Smyrne* (Leyden, 1909), figs. 1–24; C. Hahn, "The Creation of the Cosmos: Genesis Illustration in the Octateuchs," *CahArch* 28 (1979): 29–40. The non-Genesis manuscripts with images of the Fall are investigated below.

¹⁸A. Ürich, *Kain und Abel in der Kunst* (Bamberg, 1981). Although this account does include the Salerno ivory plaques, it excludes Byzantine ivory caskets showing Cain and Abel, which are considered below.

¹⁹See J. B. Glenthøj, "Cain and Abel in Syriac and Greek Writers (4th–6th Centuries)" (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1991), 41–47, who quotes examples such as Clement of Alexandria and Irenaeus, as well as other Early Christian and Gnostic writers. In Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Topographie chrétienne*, SC 159, ed. and trans. W. Wolska-Conus (Paris, 1970), 5:75, Abel is described as a type of Christ, and in the Vatican copy (Vat. gr. 699, fol. 55r) he is depicted as a shepherd: C. Stornajolo, *Le miniature della Topografia christiana di Cosma Indicopleuste: Codice Vaticano Greco 699* (Milan, 1908), 33, pl. 18.

²⁰A. Goldschmidt and K. Weitzmann, *Die byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen des X.–XIII. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 1, *Kästen* (Berlin, 1930), nos. 67–81, 86, 87; A. Cutler, "On Byzantine Boxes," *JWalt* 42–43 (1984–85): 32–43.

the murder even more closely by depicting them on the same plaque (Fig. 12).²¹ These plaques show that the theological (or narrative) message that was being conveyed at Trebizond by the choice of these end points belonged to a wider tradition in Byzantium. However, the ivories do not help to establish what the message was. None of the ivory examples exactly matches the scenes at Trebizond (they all include the creation of Adam at the start), and the meaning and function of all the caskets are very uncertain.²² It is not even known whether the choice of the Genesis scenes is linked to a religious or a secular function: were the depictions of the Fall designed to be understood in association with some liturgical setting, or were they to be read simply as a narrative in the same way as were the mythological stories on other caskets of similar date, size, and design? It is possible that the frieze at Trebizond may help to elucidate these caskets, rather than the other way round. In any case, what is significant is that the narrative range used at Trebizond was already well established in the Byzantine world.

It is obvious that the frieze is concerned with the Fall of Man, but the choice of scenes gives it an unusual, even unpleasant, emphasis. The frieze presents an especially misogynistic view of the Fall. The opening scene shows the creation of woman as the start of all man's problems, with its inexorable result—sin and murder—depicted at the end. The link is reinforced by the poses of Adam and Eve being repeated in those of Cain and Abel at each end of the frieze. The association of Eve with death was a recognized theme in Christian theology from Tertullian onward.²³ Ephrem the Syrian, for example, wrote that Eve “was the virgin, whose wall the Evil One pierced with her own hands and by whose fruit he made men taste death. And Eve, the mother of all the living, became the source of death for all the living”;²⁴ and Gregory Nazianzos noted in Homily 13, “On the Canticle,” that Eve “introduced death through her sin.”²⁵ A similar interpretation can be found in many other writers, such as Ephrem the Greek, who also wrote of Eve as the cause of death.²⁶ However, it is extremely rare to find this link depicted so clearly in art. The only comparable example that I have been able to find is the bronze doors of Hildesheim cathedral, commissioned by Bishop Bernward in 1015.²⁷ On the left door, the story

²¹ Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, *Die byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen*, no. 70; J. Durand, ed., *Byzance: L'art byzantin dans les collections publiques françaises* (Paris, 1992), 261–62, no. 170.

²² H. C. Evans and W. D. Wixom, eds., *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843–1261* (New York, 1997), 222, 234, classify them as luxury, secular objects, probably designed as wedding gifts. This is based on the decoration of the Darmstadt casket, which includes a further figure with a money-bag, identified as Ο ΠΛΟΥΤΟΣ (Wealth), who acts as a reminder of the transience of good fortune. Henry Maguire has recently expanded this idea in “Magic and Money in the Early Middle Ages,” *Speculum* 72 (1997): 1037–54, esp. 1047–50. He suggests that the scenes are antithetical, and that the protection of wealth is assured through penance, as modeled by Adam and Eve. While this argument provides a convincing function for the caskets, it ignores their precise narrative, which seems as much concerned with death as with penance.

²³ Many of the texts are collected together in H. Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, vol. 1 (London, 1963); also J. A. Phillips, *Eve: The History of an Idea* (New York, 1984).

²⁴ Quoted in Graef, *Mary*, 61.

²⁵ Gregory Nazianzos, PG 44:1053B.

²⁶ Quoted in Glenthøj, “Cain and Abel,” 372.

²⁷ R. Wesenberg, *Bernwardische Plastik: Zur ottonischen Kunst unter Bischof Bernward von Hildesheim* (Berlin, 1955), 65–80; W. Tronzo, “The Hildesheim Doors: An Iconographic Source and Its Implications,” *ZKunstg* 46 (1983): 357–66. One further example may exist in the Creation/Fall page of the 9th-century Carolingian Moutier-Grandval Bible (London, British Library, Add. 10546, fol. 5v). In the lowest register, hanging from

of the Fall is depicted in seven scenes that descend from the creation of Eve to the murder of Abel (although an image of the sacrifices of Cain and Abel is also included).²⁸

I return to this emphasis on Eve later, but for now it is clear that, in general, the frieze on the south porch was to prepare those entering the church: it was a reminder of man's flawed nature and his need for redemption. The south porch is a call to penitence.²⁹ It would have been the first element of the church that worshipers saw as they entered the monastic complex through its original entrance to the southwest of the enclosure (where the modern entrance is today). The richness of the porch decoration, and especially the imperial eagle that crowns the keystone of the arch, indicates that this (rather than the west entrance) was the principal door into the church. This would bring Trapezuntine practice into line with that of Georgia, where the south entrance generally acted as the principal door into the church.³⁰ After being reminded of their weakness, worshipers entered the naos of the church where the frescoes all around would have described the life of Christ and his sacrifice to redeem all mankind. Indeed, the first view of the north wall of the church explicitly showed this, as it was there that the Passion was played out (these frescoes are in very bad condition now, but fragments of the Crucifixion and Anastasis survive as well as figures from either the Entombment or the Lamentation).³¹ And as viewers then looked at the central features of the church—the dome and the apse—they would see images of the Ascension and Christ Pantokrator. The frieze therefore forms part of a progression from exterior to interior, from sin to salvation.

A compositional structure similar to this narrative can be found in other images of the Fall. In an eleventh-century copy of John Klimakos's *Heavenly Ladder* (Vat. gr. 394, fol. 77r), an image of the temptation and expulsion accompanies Homily 14, "On Gluttony" (Fig. 13).³² This rung of the ladder reminds the reading monk that Adam and Eve would not have sinned if they had succeeded in resisting their appetite for the forbidden fruit.³³ The narrative moves from left to right, but makes a parallel division between interior and exterior: life in Paradise is depicted within the border of the image and the text, whereas the expulsion pushes Adam and Eve literally beyond the frame and into the empty margin. The margins of the page are used in exactly the same way in a

the garland over the seat on which Eve sits breastfeeding Cain, is a minute picture within the miniature (ca. 8 mm²), which, Herbert Kessler has argued, depicts Cain's murder of Abel: H. L. Kessler, "An Unnoticed Scene in the Grandval Bible," *CahArch* 17 (1967): 113–20.

²⁸The interpretation of this door has always been regarded as inseparable from the narrative of Christ's incarnation and life that ascends on the right door, from the Annunciation to the *Noli me tangere*. The location of the Hildesheim Fall cycle at the entrance to the cathedral, its use of narrative direction, and the direct parallels drawn between the Fall and the incarnation of Christ through Mary are all echoed at Trebizond. Hildesheim provides an excellent, if indirect, model of ways in which to read and interpret the narrative in the frieze at Trebizond.

²⁹This is the meaning of the frieze stressed by Safran, "The Genesis Frieze," 29.

³⁰The majority of medieval churches in Georgia have their south entrance accentuated by means of a porch or additional decoration, and this can be traced back to 6th-century churches, such as Jvari. For examples, see A. Alpago-Novello, V. Beridze, and J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Art and Architecture in Medieval Georgia* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1980): Jvari (p. 389), Betania (p. 296), Cinarexi (p. 311), Kvataxevi (p. 370), Manglisi (p. 376), Samtavro in Mxeta (p. 392), and Nikorcminda (p. 411).

³¹Talbot Rice, *Hagia Sophia*, 117–20, figs. 80, 81.

³²J. R. Martin, *The Illustration of the Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus*, Studies in Manuscript Illumination 5 (Princeton, N.J., 1954), 68–69, fig. 106.

³³John Klimakos, PG 88:864–72.

fourteenth-century copy of the Homilies of Gregory Nazianzos (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cod. gr. 543, fol. 116v), in order to divide Eden from the world and innocence from sin (Fig. 24).³⁴ In the luxuriously illuminated twelfth-century copy of the Homilies of James of Kokkinobaphos in the Vatican (Vat. gr. 1162, fols. 35v, 37r), the same sense of interior and exterior, abundance and aridity, is spread over a series of images (Figs. 14, 15).³⁵ On folio 33r, in the bottom right corner of the page, the expulsion is shown, followed on folio 35v by Adam and Eve lamenting their Fall on a brown, bare hill, while Cain murders Abel below them. This is immediately followed by an image of the Garden of Eden, now empty, its door barred by three angels. In contrast to the image of life outside Eden, this page is a riot of plenty, placed on a rich, golden ground. At Trebizond, it is only by entering the church that the viewers were able to reenter Paradise. The shell design over the main arch of the south porch, which echoes the design of the gate of Paradise in the image on the frieze (albeit upside down), reinforces this idea of the porch being the entrance to Paradise on earth. The location of the image at the threshold of the church thus creates part of its meaning and forces its viewers to take part in the narrative as they prepare to enter the church.

The two inscriptions allow the circumstances of the frieze's progression to be examined with greater precision. As noted earlier, the first inscription forms part of the Lenten Triodion. Monumental liturgical inscriptions are very rare on the facades of Byzantine churches, which gives this inscription definite emphasis. It was intoned as part of the vesper service on the eve of the Sunday of Forgiveness.³⁶ The right-hand half of the inscription, the verse from Genesis 2.8, was read out at vespers on the first Thursday of Lent.³⁷ We also know that Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel were all featured prominently during Lenten homilies: John Chrysostom's *Homilies on Genesis*, which examine the meaning of all these events, were read out during Lent.³⁸

These considerations indicate that the church of Hagia Sophia must have played an important role in the liturgical calendar of the empire of Trebizond at the beginning of Lent. Anthony Bryer has shown how, in the fourteenth century, the Feast of the Transfiguration was the patronal day of the church,³⁹ and I propose that the start of Lent was also specially celebrated at Hagia Sophia. Only during this one week of the year would the full significance of the frieze and its inscriptions become apparent as the meanings of the images and texts were brought to life by the service. The emphasis demonstrated by the frieze—it is the only element of the church's narrative decoration to be built into the architecture—shows that it must have been regarded as a central feature of the church's (or at least the porch's) function at the time when it was built. The uniqueness

³⁴G. Galavaris, *The Illustrations of the Liturgical Homilies of Gregory Nazianzenus*, Studies in Manuscript Illumination 6 (Princeton, N.J., 1969), fig. 462.

³⁵C. Stornajolo, *Miniature delle Omilie di Giacomo Monaco (Cod. Vatic. gr. 1162) e dell' evangelario greco urbinato (Cod. Vatic. Urb. gr. 2)* (Rome, 1910), pls. 11–13.

³⁶In other words, this phrase was recited on the Saturday evening, the liturgical beginning of the Sunday of Forgiveness: *Triodion*, 100; trans. Mother Mary and Ware, *The Lenten Triodion*, 168.

³⁷*Triodion*, 155; trans. Mother Mary and Ware, *The Lenten Triodion*, 254.

³⁸John Chrysostom, PG 53:164.

³⁹A. A. M. Bryer and D. Winfield, *The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos*, DOS 20 (Washington, D.C., 1985), 232–33.

of the Trebizond liturgical inscription, and of the porch itself, means that it is not possible to examine this relationship in greater detail; however, this is the only logical explanation of the presence of these various elements.

Clothed/Naked

The reversal of the clothed and naked states of Adam and Eve is the problem that has exercised writers most on the Genesis frieze. Alpatov proposed that the reversal could be best explained by "Oriental" parallels,⁴⁰ yet it is not necessary to look to such remote sources for models: the phenomenon is not as unusual as has been presumed. For example, in two Octateuch manuscripts (Vat. gr. 746, fol. 37r; and Istanbul, Topkapı gr. 8, fol. 42v), the protoplasts are shown clothed before the Fall (Fig. 16).⁴¹ Herbert Broderick has noted the reasons for this: Genesis 3.7 states that after Adam and Eve had eaten the forbidden fruit they "perceived themselves to be naked," which raises the question of how it had been hidden from them until that moment.⁴² There evolved a theology about prelapsarian garments, robes of grace or light, discussed by John Chrysostom and others.⁴³ The apocryphal Books of Adam also mention this story very prominently: "At that hour I learned with my own eyes that I was naked of the glory with which I had been clothed."⁴⁴ It seems, then, that the artist was following an existing, if uncommon, trend in order to emphasize the nature of the Fall and the loss of the divine glory that had surrounded Adam and Eve.

A more immediate source for this reversal can also be found. This is the text of the Lenten Triodion itself. In the course of the vesper service on the eve of the Sunday of Forgiveness, Adam is no less than four times described as being naked outside Paradise: "In my wretchedness I have cast off the robe woven by God . . ."; "Naked he sat outside the garden, lamenting . . ."; "Adam sat before Paradise and, lamenting his nakedness, he wept"; "Woe is me! In my simplicity I was stripped naked, and now I am in want."⁴⁵ The third quotation was, of course, used as the inscription to accompany the frieze. It is clear from this that the artists and craftsmen had been instructed to illustrate the liturgical, *not* the biblical, account of the Fall, and so needed to show the move from clothed to naked, rather than the other way around. The frieze does not represent a literal rendition of Genesis 2, as Alpatov suggested in 1927;⁴⁶ rather, it is dependent on the liturgical text. If part of the service took place before this frieze, it simply would not have made sense for the biblical version of the Genesis narrative to have been followed.

⁴⁰Alpatov, "Les reliefs de la Sainte-Sophie," 415–18.

⁴¹H. Schade, "Adam und Eve," in *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, ed. E. Kirschbaum (Rome-Freiburg, 1972), 1: cols. 44–51. The reversal also occurs in the frescoes of the Otranto cathedral: L. Safran, *San Pietro at Otranto: Byzantine Art in South Italy* (Rome, 1992), 110. Alpatov notes a further example of this phenomenon in the Novgorod Bible (a reference copied by Talbot Rice, *Haghia Sophia*, 48); he cites this manuscript as Moscow, Synodal Library 1147, but I have been unable to find any other reference to it, and Alpatov gives no photograph.

⁴²H. R. Broderick, "A Note on the Garments of Paradise," *Byzantion* 55 (1985): 250–54.

⁴³John Chrysostom, PG 53:125.

⁴⁴G. A. Anderson and M. E. Stone, *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve* (Atlanta, Ga., 1994), 46. See also J. Issavardens, trans., *The Uncanonical Writings of the Old Testament Found in the Armenian Manuscripts of the Library of St. Lazarus, Venice* (Venice, 1901), 21, 22, 41, 44.

⁴⁵*Triodion*, 134; trans. Mother Mary and Ware, *The Lenten Triodion*, 168–69.

⁴⁶Alpatov, "Les reliefs de la Sainte-Sophie," 412.

The decision to emphasize this aspect of the Fall fits in with the overall interpretation of the frieze, but it may also have been influenced by the particular local circumstances of the empire of Trebizond, in particular Armenian and Islamic ideas. The Books of Adam, for example, existed in Greek but were more common in Armenian, and it is known that many Armenians fled to Trebizond in 1239, after the sack of Ani by the Mongols, and that a number of Armenian monasteries were founded in and around Trebizond.⁴⁷

Prelapsarian garments are mentioned in the Qur'an and *hadith* as well,⁴⁸ and Islamic ideas associating nudity with shame may also have influenced the iconography. An Ilkhanid translation into Persian of Ibn Bakhtishu's *Manafi-i hayawan* [Benefits of animals] (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M500, fol. 4v), which was copied at Maragha in northwestern Iran in 1297–98 or 1299–1300, shortly after the construction of Hagia Sophia, shows a human couple covering their nudity with (admittedly rather revealing) cloaks (Fig. 17). The manuscript provides scientific descriptions of animals, but it is clear that its illuminations were unable to be as frank about human biology as about any other species.⁴⁹ Barbara Schmitz has recently shown that these two figures are not, in fact, Adam and Eve, but rather just two human animals, *Mard va Zan* ("man and woman").⁵⁰ However, certain details of the iconography, such as the haloes, suggest that the image is based on depictions of the first humans. It is impossible to detect any consistency in Iranian views on nudity and shame, and in the Edinburgh copy of al-Bîrûnî's *al-Athar al-baqiya* [Chronology of ancient nations] (Edinburgh, University Library, Or. Ms. 161, fol. 48v), which was copied a decade later, in 1307–8, the Zoroastrian equivalent of Adam and Eve, Misha and Mishyana, are shown naked when tempted by Ahriman (Fig. 18).⁵¹ Although both of these examples date later than Hagia Sophia, it is possible that Iranian ideas could have moved to Trebizond from the east, along the trade routes that were strengthened under the Mongols in the second half of the thirteenth century.⁵²

Reverse Narrative

The other peculiarity of the Genesis frieze, the right-to-left direction of the narrative, has also traditionally been explained by reference to "Oriental" art.⁵³ Syriac art, in partic-

⁴⁷Bryer and Winfield, *The Byzantine Monuments*, 210, also note the problems with dating the monasteries' foundations.

⁴⁸Qur'an, trans. M. Pickthall (London, 1992), 7.22, 27; al-Tabari, *Ta'arikh al-rusul wa'l-muluk* [The history of al-Tabari], vol. 1, *General Introduction and from the Creation to the Flood*, tr. F. Rosenthal (New York, 1989), 276: "But by tearing their clothes, Iblis wanted to show them their secret parts, which had been concealed from them."

⁴⁹For other illustrations, see S. S. Blair and J. M. Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam, 1250–1800* (New Haven, Conn.–London, 1994), 25–26.

⁵⁰B. Schmitz, *Islamic and Indian Manuscripts and Paintings in the Pierpoint Morgan Library* (New York, 1997), 17; I am grateful to Roger S. Wieck for providing me with this information in advance of publication.

⁵¹P. Soucek, "An Illustrated Manuscript of al-Bîrûnî's *Chronology of Ancient Nations*," in *The Scholar and the Saint: Studies in Commemoration of Abu'l-Rayhan al-Bîrûnî and Jalal ad-Dîn al-Rûmî*, ed. P. Chelkowski (New York, 1975), 103–65, esp. 111. This image was also influenced by Christian iconography of the Fall.

⁵²Under the Mongols, the western end of these trade routes moved north to the ports of the Black Sea, and principally to Trebizond, away from the Mediterranean coast of Syria, which resisted the Mongol rule more successfully. On trade routes, see Bryer and Winfield, *The Byzantine Monuments*, 56, 92; H. Manandian, *The Trade and Cities of Armenia in Relation to Ancient World Trade* (Lisbon, 1965), 189–97.

⁵³Talbot Rice, *Haghia Sophia*, 48–49. As before, Talbot Rice has converted a hypothesis of Alpatov, "Les reliefs de la Sainte-Sophie," 414, into a bold assertion.

ular, has been proposed as a source for this feature, as, for example, the early-thirteenth-century Syriac Gospel Lectionary (London, British Library, Add. 7170, fol. 115r), in which the entry to Jerusalem has a right-to-left narrative (Fig. 19).⁵⁴ In other words, the choice of the narrative direction has generally been seen as a formal characteristic of the frieze, and so has been explained as an artistic decision, rather than one with any theological or other meaning, or any interpretative rationale. This approach has seriously limited the analysis of the Trebizond frieze. Moreover, if we accept the Syriac artist explanation, then we are led to some bizarre, simplistic conclusions about medieval artistic practice in general. Such an interpretation would assume that artists automatically and invariably used their “normal” compositional devices brought by them from their training at home (in this case, the right-to-left narrative), and that they were unable (or unwilling) to adjust this idiom to suit the predominant left-to-right reading pattern of their new location. (This issue is raised again by the style of all the geometric plaques and stalactite impost blocks on the facade of the church, and is addressed at length elsewhere.) It also implies that the designer of the church (let us say, for the sake of argument, its patron Manuel I) either especially wanted reverse narrative, and so had to invite foreign artists (which implies that local artists were somehow incapable of carrying it out), or took no interest in the appearance of the frieze and allowed the artists to carry out the commission in their native tradition and in ignorance of normal Greek practice. One is left with either very inflexible artists, or an uninterested, laissez-faire patron. However, the contrast between the direction of the frieze and that of the inscriptions, which must have been very apparent to the artists and planners of the frieze, suggests that this difference was a much more deliberate decision.

It is, of course, possible to find examples of reverse narrative throughout the Byzantine and eastern Christian worlds. In the Old Church at Tokalı Kilise, each half of the christological cycle on the vault of the cave begins with the initial scene reversed (Fig. 20);⁵⁵ and the Haġbat Gospels (Erevan, Matenadaran, 6288, fol. 16v), copied and illuminated in Mqargrdzeli/Zakharid-controlled northern Armenia in 1211, contain an image of the entry to Jerusalem in which the narrative runs from right to left (Fig. 21).⁵⁶ However, in none of the examples is there any consistency: in Tokalı Kilise the majority of other scenes move from left to right, and the Haġbat Gospels image is exceptional. Even in the Syriac Gospel Lectionary, narrative direction is variable, and the Annunciation on folio 15r moves from left to right (Fig. 22).⁵⁷ None of these cases is really comparable to the extended nature of the narrative frieze at Trebizond. The reversed scenes are either isolated examples in longer cycles or separate iconic images to be viewed and considered individually.

These examples show that right-to-left narrative movement should not be simply linked to a cultural or artistic origin, with the scheme determined by the preconceptions

⁵⁴J. Leroy, *Les manuscrits syriaques à peintures conservés dans les bibliothèques d'Europe et d'Orient* (Paris, 1964), pl. 86, fig. 1; Evans and Wixom, *The Glory of Byzantium*, 385. This explanation also requires us to find concrete links between Trebizond and Syriac communities that might explain the transmission of ideas.

⁵⁵A. W. Epstein, *Tokalı Kilise*, DOS 22 (Washington, D.C., 1986), 14–15, fig. 16, argues that the reason for this is to mark out the beginning of each section of narrative.

⁵⁶T. F. Mathews and A. K. Sanjian, *Armenian Gospel Iconography: The Tradition of the Glajor Gospel*, DOS 29 (Washington, D.C., 1991), 60–61, in which it is argued that this image is itself influenced by Syriac sources.

⁵⁷Leroy, *Les manuscrits syriaques*, pl. 73, fig. 3.

or limitations of the artist. It has been used many times in Byzantine, Armenian, and Syriac art, often without any apparent meaning. If one is to find a meaning in this feature, one must look elsewhere for a system whereby a choice such as this can have a distinct explanation. I wish to suggest here that the narrative of the frieze is, in fact, more carefully organized than previous analysis has supposed, and that it is not dependent on some posited but imprecise connection between Trebizond and Syriac communities in Mesopotamia or Anatolia. Instead, it can be read coherently within mainstream Byzantine art. This does not mean that the visual parallels listed above may not have been influential, especially given the mixed ethnic and cultural makeup of the empire of Trebizond—only that the previous approach limits explanation to a purely artistic decision and thus cannot provide a complete interpretation of the frieze.

The interpretation I propose is based on creating a parallel model for the appearance of the narrative of the Fall in Byzantine art. There is no direct link between the images discussed below and those at Trebizond, and therefore no absolute system can be established. However, the parallels of iconography and context suggest that the use of narrative direction could be an important element in the construction of meaning. They also allow us to establish models for the interpretation of the Fall and its relation to the liturgy.

The most important comparison is with the fourteenth-century manuscript of the Homilies of Gregory Nazianzos (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cod. gr. 543).⁵⁸ This is one of the later copies of the so-called liturgical edition, in which sixteen of Gregory's homilies were presented in calendar order of the feasts and events discussed in the texts. The copy was made sometime after the building of Hagia Sophia, and I do not wish to suggest any direct connection between the two, only to present them as parallel phenomena. In this copy, each of the sixteen homilies is preceded by a full-page introductory miniature with two registers, related to the event discussed in the sermon.⁵⁹ A typical example is folio 74v, which precedes Homily 15, "On the Martyrdom of the Maccabees" (Fig. 23). In the image the various acts of martyrdom are shown in both registers. A strong symmetry to the scenes is dictated by the landscape (with two mountains on either side and a third one in the center), but the images read from left to right (as is shown by the movement of the figures and the fact that the mountains recede from left to right). Both registers present conventional images with a straightforward narrative structure, overriding symmetry, and known iconographic origins and parallels.⁶⁰ The system is common to all the other surviving miniatures in the manuscript—with one exception.

This is the miniature that precedes Homily 38, "On the Nativity/Theophany" (Fig. 24). The upper register shows the Nativity, conflating the birth of Christ, the adoration of the Magi and shepherds, and the first bath of the Christ child, all of which are common enough. The lower scene introduces the Fall of Man in three scenes: the quickening of Adam/creation of Eve, Adam and Eve in Eden, and Adam and Eve lamenting after the

⁵⁸Galavaris, *Liturgical Homilies*, 14–15, 140–42.

⁵⁹Two of the miniatures are missing, having been removed.

⁶⁰In the case of this scene, the images are more dependent on the details from the fourth book of Maccabees than on the details from Gregory's homilies, which give only generalized accounts of the martyrdoms; but the relation between the image and the homily is very straightforward. See Galavaris, *Liturgical Homilies*, 109–13.

expulsion.⁶¹ What is interesting about this image is that it reads from right to left, unlike any other in the manuscript. The artist has also used the psychological device of placing the scene of Adam and Eve after the expulsion beyond the frame of the miniature, in the margin, to emphasize man's distance from Paradise.

This provides a very interesting visual interpretation of the homily. In Homily 38, Gregory proclaims the Nativity as man's chance to reenter into obedience and harmony with God, the contract dissolved by the Fall.⁶² Christ is the new Adam. The image demonstrates this by placing the Nativity and the scenes in Eden within the rich, broad decorative frame of the miniature, reflecting the parallel between the two chances that God has offered to man, as well as the parallel between the creations of Christ and Adam. The placing of the scene of life outside Eden outside the frame reinforces the message by demonstrating the barrenness and pain of life after disobedience.⁶³

The choice of right-to-left narrative in the image acts to highlight this message. Since it is at odds with every other image in the manuscript, it forces the reader to reevaluate the scenes and their meaning. Instead of a normal left-to-right narrative progression, one sees here a narrative *regression* in which harm, rather than good, is the outcome of the events. Equally, to read from left to right is to see a return from the state of sin to purity—a return to Adam and the state of innocence. Gregory explicitly states this to be one of the purposes of the Incarnation: “But [all the mysteries of Christ] have a sole principle: to lead me to perfection, to remodel me, to bring me back to the First Adam.”⁶⁴ It would seem that the frieze shares some of the qualities of a palindrome in that it can be read in either direction (although, in this case, a change in the direction of reading produces a different reading).⁶⁵

The second comparison is with another piece of sculpture in the empire of Trebizond. It is located high on the east wall of the citadel, across the ravine from the church of St.

⁶¹Ibid., 118–20. This is the only copy of the liturgical homilies in which the Nativity and the Fall are combined. For a concordance of all the images accompanying the liturgical homilies, see *ibid.*, 14–17. The interpretation of the first of the Genesis scenes in this miniature is disputed. H. Omont, *Miniatures des plus anciens manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale du VI^e au XIV^e siècle* (Paris, 1929), 57, thought that it represented the creation of Eve; but Galavaris, *Liturgical Homilies*, 118–19, argued against it, although conceding that the scene may be a conflation of the quickening of Adam and the creation of Eve. The image appears to show Adam lying rigid on the ground and Christ standing over him, bending to pull Adam up by his left hand and making a gesture of blessing with his right hand. It does not seem, therefore, directly to show the creation of Eve, although the iconographic pose is very similar to images of this scene.

⁶²Gregory Nazianzos, Homily 38, in *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 38–41*, ed. and trans. C. Moreschini and P. Gallay, SC 358 (Paris, 1990), 104–48.

⁶³The 9th-century complete edition of Gregory Nazianzos's homilies (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cod. gr. 510, fol. 52v) provides yet another way of interpreting the Fall in terms of homiletic literature. In this case, however, it has been shown to have specific references to 9th-century thought. See S. Der Nersessian, “The Illustrations of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus Paris Gr. 510: A Study of the Connections between Text and Images,” *DOP* 16 (1962): 197–228; L. Brubaker, “Politics, Patronage, and Art in Ninth-Century Byzantium: The Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus in Paris (B.N. Gr. 510),” *DOP* 39 (1985): 1–13.

⁶⁴Gregory Nazianzos, Homily 38.16.

⁶⁵S. Pétridès, “Les ‘karkinoi’ dans la littérature grecque,” *EO* 12 (1909): 86–94. R. Aubreton and F. Buffière, eds., *Anthologie grecque*, pt. 2, *Anthologie de Planude* (Paris, 1980), 13: bk. 16, 387b–c, record nine palindromes; and H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft 12.5.2 (Munich, 1978), 2:105–6, notes the “suitability” of palindromes for a monastic setting. I am grateful to Sarah Ekdawi and Maria Vassilaki for help with this point.

Eugenios, where it is now barely visible (Fig. 25).⁶⁶ It is another image of the expulsion from Eden. The plaque has clearly been moved there from an unknown location (along with a second plaque showing Elijah and the raven).⁶⁷ Stylistically, this image is different from the one at Hagia Sophia: it is carved in much lower relief on a single stone within a carved frame, and the figures of Adam and Eve are shown clothed; it is also more dynamic, and the figure sizes are all compatible. But, like the frieze, it portrays a pronounced foliage background, and the narrative direction is from right to left. Divorced from any context and displayed so awkwardly, this plaque is now impossible to study or date, and only the Hagia Sophia frieze survives to provide any form of comparison. The modeling of the angel and the general consistency of the figures suggest that the image is of higher quality than the one at Hagia Sophia, but I would propose that the latter provided the model for this plaque. Although there are several iconographic differences, it is interesting to note that reverse narrative has been retained in a second image at Trebizond.

Second Eve/Typology

It has been noted above that the frieze appears to concentrate on the figure of Eve. This idea can now be investigated more thoroughly in the context of the church. Typological comparisons between Christ and Adam (as well as Abel) have already been noted, but it is possible that similar comparisons were also being made between Eve and Mary, the Mother of God. The idea of Mary as the second Eve is well known, and allusions to it are often made in art.⁶⁸ In the miniatures that accompany the twelfth-century copy of the Homilies of James of Kokkinobaphos (Vat. gr. 1162, fol. 35v), it appears well illustrated.⁶⁹ Homily 2, "On the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of Our Lord God," is accompanied by images of the Fall and the first murder, the results of Eve's temptation (Fig. 14). What Eve gave birth to can only be redeemed by Christ, the son of Mary.⁷⁰ In the Nazianzos Nativity/Genesis miniature, a similar link is made between the birth of Christ and the creation of Eve: in the same way that Christ redeems Adam, Mary redeems Eve. And on the twelfth-century icon of the Mother of God with the Christ child surrounded by Old Testament prophets and saints, in the collection of St. Catherine's monastery on Mt. Sinai (Fig. 26), an inscription beneath the Virgin quotes from Romanos the Melode's hymn on the Feast of Mary's Nativity, proclaiming that "Joachim and Anna conceived and Adam and Eve were liberated."⁷¹

This system of typology has a direct parallel in Hagia Sophia. The frieze of the Fall with its emphasis on Eve is counterbalanced elsewhere in the church, namely, in the frescoes that survive in the north porch.⁷² These show an interesting and unusual choice

⁶⁶Bryer and Winfield, *The Byzantine Monuments*, 193, pl. 130a.

⁶⁷Bryer and Winfield, *The Byzantine Monuments*, 193, pl. 130b, suggest that the two reliefs may be associated, but this connection cannot be demonstrated.

⁶⁸On this subject, see Graef, *Mary*; and S. Benko, *The Virgin Goddess: Studies in the Pagan and Christian Roots of Mariology* (Leiden, 1993), 234–45.

⁶⁹*Liturgie und Andacht in Mittelalter*; Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana (Stuttgart, 1992), 132–37, esp. 134.

⁷⁰James of Kokkinobaphos, Homily 2, PG 127:580–84.

⁷¹Evans and Wixom, *The Glory of Byzantium*, 372: ΙΩΑΚΕΙΜ Κ[ΑΙ] ΑΝΝΑ ΕΤΕΚΝΟΓΟΝΗΣΑΝ Κ[ΑΙ] ΑΔΑΜ Κ[ΑΙ] ΕΥΑ ΗΛΕΥΘΕΡΩΣΑΝ.

⁷²Talbot Rice, *Hagia Sophia*, 149–55. No identifiable frescoes survive in the south porch.

of subjects, including Jacob's ladder, Jacob's struggle with the angel, Moses and the burning bush (Fig. 27), the prophet Gideon, and the Tree of Jesse.⁷³ All these images were recognized as prototypes of the Virgin, and are reflected on the Sinai icon.⁷⁴ It is also noteworthy that the Tree of Jesse culminates in the figure of Mary, not in that of Christ.⁷⁵ The introduction of monumental typological images at Trebizond is unusual, and only one earlier cycle of such frescoes is known, from the Georgian monastery of Betania, southwest of Tbilisi.⁷⁶

The typological frescoes seem to establish another line of progression through the church—from Eve as the bringer of sin in the south porch to Mary as the bringer of salvation in the north porch. This arrangement raises two points. One is that the church and its porches may have had their own processional structure; given the scale of the porches, they must have been designed for large gatherings of people, possibly moving about as part of the service. The second point is that the links between the porches argue that the program of the church was designed in advance and included both frescoes and sculpture.

Medium and Regional Context

A final, but important, issue that must be addressed is the question of why sculpture in particular should have been chosen as the medium in which to portray this image. After all, sculpture is unusual in Byzantine art, and narrative reliefs are extremely rare. Here we find ourselves on firmer ground by looking at the regional context of the frieze and its possible models. However, first it is necessary to discount one famous and much quoted possible source, the Armenian church of the Holy Cross at Aġ'amar on Lake Van, erected by King Gagik of Vaspurakan between 915 and 921. It has often been cited in conjunction with Trebizond since it too has Genesis scenes carved on the exterior of the church.⁷⁷ On the north facade two scenes from Genesis 3 appear: the temptation of Eve

⁷³Images of Job and the hospitality of Abraham also survive in the north porch. These have typological meanings as well, but are generally associated with Christ rather than Mary.

⁷⁴On Marian typology, see S. Der Nersessian, "The Program and Iconography of the Frescoes of the Parecclesion," in *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 4, *Studies in the Art of the Kariye Djami and Its Intellectual Background*, ed. P. A. Underwood, Bollingen Series 70 (Princeton, N.J., 1975), 303–49, esp. 310–13.

⁷⁵Talbot Rice, *Haghia Sophia*, fig. 115.

⁷⁶Earlier examples of individual images are, of course, known, such as the 12th-century Tree of Jesse in the church of the Nativity at Bethlehem; but Betania contains the earliest typological cycle. On this church, see A. Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia* (University Park, Pa., 1998), 154–69; E. Privalova, "Betaniis moxat'uloba" [The paintings of Betania], in *Sabč'ota xelovneba* [Soviet art], pt. 8 (1980): 55–62. This may point to links between Trebizond and Georgia. Betania was taken from its owners, the Orbeli family, and partially decorated by Queen Tamar (1184–1213), who was involved in the foundation of the empire of Trebizond. The nature and extent of the links between Trebizond and Georgia after 1204 have long been disputed, but this may tentatively point to the survival of some intellectual ties between the royal families of the two countries. Manuel I was married to the princess Rusudan of Georgia; see M. Kuršanskis, "Relations matrimoniales entre Grands Comnènes de Trébizonde et princes géorgiens," *BK* 34 (1976): 112–27.

⁷⁷For example, Talbot Rice, *Haghia Sophia*, 49; Alpatov, "Les reliefs de la Sainte-Sophie," 417. Another possible source to be discounted is the sculpture of Rus'. Vladimir-Suzdal' had a tradition of external sculptural decoration in the 12th and 13th centuries, in the form of a mass of individual images that encrusted the façades of the churches. Again, there are few formal similarities, and little evidence of any artistic transmission between the two states. On the sculpture, see G. K. Vagner, *Skul'ptura Drevnej Rusi, XII vek: Vladimir, Bogoliubovo* (Moscow, 1969).

(Fig. 28) and Eve offering the forbidden fruit to Adam (Fig. 29).⁷⁸ No other scenes from the Fall are shown on the exterior, and in both reliefs the protoplasts are depicted naked in Paradise. The style and the scale of the reliefs are completely different from those of the Trebizond frieze, and the discrepancy in date is large and obvious. Additionally, the contemporaneous fresco cycle of the Fall painted between the windows of the drum of the dome inside the church runs only from the creation of Adam to the expulsion from Eden.⁷⁹ Thus, Ałt'amar cannot be seriously considered in conjunction with Trebizond.

A chronologically more reasonable comparison can be found in another Armenian carving of Adam and Eve, this time on the west face of the dome of the nearly contemporary church of Ganjasar, dated to ca. 1230 (Fig. 30).⁸⁰ However, once again, iconographic and stylistic comparisons with Trebizond are few: the couple are shown naked before the Fall, and the figures are schematic and flat. Still, Ałt'amar and Ganjasar, like the Books of Adam, provide more evidence of Armenian interest in the story of the Fall. These examples also demonstrate the tradition of sculptural façade decoration in Armenia continuing into the thirteenth century. Sculptural decorations appear on church tympana in both Georgia and Armenia in this period. This shows that carving was still part of the regular artistic vocabulary of the eastern churches. But the carvings tend to be iconic or symbolic representations rather than narrative accounts, and do not present a realistic model on which to base Trebizond.⁸¹

However, there is one little-known example that can be more closely tied to Hagia Sophia in Trebizond. This is a pair of reliefs on the so-called Georgian church in Ani, which have never been properly published (Fig. 31).⁸² On the interior north wall (which is all that survives of the church) are two reliefs, each located under a blind arcade. The scenes show the Annunciation and the Visitation (Figs. 32, 33). It seems likely that they once formed part of a longer cycle of scenes from the early life of Christ that ran around the walls of the church. The images are carved in the tufa used throughout Ani, which results in a slightly cruder style than that of the reliefs at Trebizond, but they have roughly the same scale and depth of relief. We know that they were made by or for the Georgian community in the city by 1218, at a time when Ani was the capital of a semi-autonomous fiefdom held by the Mqargrdzeli/Zakharid family from the Georgian crown.

In 1239, Ani was sacked by the invading Mongols under Chamarghan, which resulted in a large exodus of its population to Trebizond. I do not intend to propose a direct transmission from Ani to Trebizond of an artist who would then be responsible for both churches, but I do think that this context provides the best parallels for the use of sculp-

⁷⁸S. Der Nersessian, *Church of the Holy Cross, Ałt'amar* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), figs. 41, 47, 48.

⁷⁹T. F. Mathews, "The Genesis Frescoes of Ałt'amar," *REArm* 16 (1982): 245–57; N. Thierry, "Le cycle de la création et de la faute d'Adam à Ałt'amar," *REArm* 17 (1983): 289–329; B. Outtier, "Le cycle d'Adam à Ałt'amar et la version arménienne du commentaire de S. Ephrem sur la Genèse," *REArm* 18 (1984): 589–92.

⁸⁰P. Donabedian and J.-M. Thierry, *Les arts arméniens* (Paris, 1987), pl. 86, fig. 715.

⁸¹For 13th-century Armenian tympana sculptures, see Donabedian and Thierry, *Les arts arméniens*, figs. 335–46. Figural sculpture in Georgia is less common after the 11th century; see N. A. Aladashvili, *Monumental'naia skul'ptura Gruzii* (Moscow, 1977).

⁸²The church inscription was published by N. I. Marr, "Nadpis' Epifanija, katalikosa Gruzii (iz raskopok v Ani, 1910 g.)," *Izvestija Imperatorskoj Akademii Nauk* 4 (1910): 1433–42. The reliefs are mentioned in P. Cuneo et al., *Ani, Documenti di architettura armena* 12 (Milan, 1984), 91, but are described as deriving from 12th-century Byzantine art.

ture at Trebizond. More specifically, it further emphasizes the regional character of the art in Trebizond. The principal features of the frieze—its iconography and the choice of medium—have had strong precedents in Georgia and Armenia. It is to the Caucasus that we must turn in order to understand properly the context of the decoration of the church.

III. CONCLUSION

I have attempted to show in this article that, in order to understand and interpret the frieze most fully, it is necessary to find its place in the mainstream of Byzantine artistic practice. Its relation to the liturgy that it must have accompanied provides the fullest explanation of the frieze's function, and other images of the Fall in different contexts also help to explain the possible ways in which it may have been understood. Nevertheless, the frieze remains highly unusual when seen in a purely Byzantine context. Here, the many parallels drawn from Georgian, Armenian, and Islamic sources provide many possible points of comparison. I have shown that none of these can be considered a direct source of inspiration for Hagia Sophia at Trebizond, yet taken as a group, they show how deeply the individual elements of the frieze were influenced by local regional sources. The frieze provides a concrete expression of the links between the Grand Komnenoi, their neighbors to the east—Georgia and Armenia—and their trading partners of the second half of the thirteenth century.

This opens up interesting possibilities for using the church of Hagia Sophia and its decoration to investigate more deeply the questions of the cultural orientation of the empire of Trebizond in this period. The precarious position of the empire on the fringes of the Greek world, surrounded as it was by Armenian, Georgian, and Seljuq states, and its political turmoil in the wake of the Mongol invasion mean that the self-identity constructed by the Grand Komnenoi has never been fully explored. To what extent did they create a pocket Greek empire, imitating Constantinople; and to what extent did they absorb local institutions and ideas? Hagia Sophia, the only surviving piece of contemporary evidence, can help to fill in many of the gaps in the history of an empire driven, like Adam and Eve, into exile on the margins of the Byzantine world.

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